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SUBJECT: PRT LASHKAR GAH: SUICIDE BOMBING INCIDENT AT
GOVERNOR'S COMPOUND

11. (SBU) At 1250hrs on December 12, an explosion occurred inside the Helmand Governor's compound in Lashkar Gah, within the courtyard but outside the building. It appears that a suicide bomber was responsible. One account reports that one of the guards was trying to usher the bomber away from the building's entrance when the device detonated. Eight were killed, excluding the bomber, all Afghan: five Afghan National Police (ANP) and three civilians. Approximately eight were injured, all Afghan.

12. (SBU) Governor Daud was inside his compound when the bomb detonated; according to one report he was not far from the entrance to the courtyard, possibly on his way out of the building for lunch. He was unharmed, though members of his close protection team might have been among the dead or injured. (NOTE: President Karzai decided to relieve Daud and his deputy of their offices o/a December 5 although no official announcement has been issued yet; after leaving Helmand with his family, Daud returned on December 10, presumably to ensure a smooth transition to a new governor. END NOTE.) The Deputy Governor, also in the building at the time, was likewise uninjured. Two UK military liaisons working with the Joint Provincial Coordination Center were in the building; neither was injured.

13. (SBU) The Poppy Elimination Program (PEP) compound, located next to the Governor's, was hit by some shrapnel (and human flesh). Some windows in the building were broken or cracked. There were no injuries to PEP personnel. USAID's Alternative Livelihoods Program (ALP) compound, located two blocks away from the Governor's compound, reported no damage or injuries, just some rattling windows. The USAID representative in the PRT and one ALP staff member were supposed to have a meeting with the Governor that morning, but it was canceled.

14. (SBU) According to the BBC, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that they had targeted the Governor and that the bomber was a native of Helmand. The Ministry of Information and Culture will release a

statement, denouncing the incident as a cowardly and indiscriminate act that slows development in the province and will link it to foreign Taliban.

15. (SBU) This was the fourth suicide bombing incident in downtown Lashkar Gah in less than four months, and the second one in the immediate vicinity of the Governor,s compound. Dozens of Afghans have been killed and injured in these incidents, and one British soldier was killed.

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